DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 181 495 CS 502 741

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TITLE Approaches to the Teaching of Oral Communication.
PUB DATE Jul 79
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Conference on Developing Oral Communication Competence in Children (Armidale, Australia, July 12-18, 1979)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Communication Skills; *Educational Theories; Elementary Secondary Education; Information Theory; *Speech Communication; Speech Curriculum; *Speech Instruction; *Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS *Oral Language

ABSTRACT

Serving as an introduction to a conference for Australian educators on developing oral communication skills, this paper reviews current methods of teaching speech skills. The paper describes a basic approach that holds that a learner's improved use of a skill is related to the number of satisfying experiences the learner has using the skill. It also summarizes a teaching method based on the work of James Moffett that was recommended by the participants in a curriculum workshop in Canberra in 1974. In addition, three theories of teaching communication are described: teaching of techniques or discrete communication skills, teaching of rhetorical principles (the classic divisions of invention, disposition, style, memory, and delivery) and teaching of interaction skills (understanding one's own needs and responding sensitively and empathically to other's needs). (AEA)

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APPROACHES TO THE TEACHING OF ORAL COMMUNICATION*

W.J. Crocker

Andrew Wilkinson invented the term oracy in 1965 to describe "general ability in the skills of speaking and listening." He said than that the "the task ahead is to define it (oracy) in terms of particular skills and attainments, for different ages, groups, circumstances; to discover the best methods of teaching it, to bring it into synthesis with other work, especially that designed to promote literacy". [1] That task has been pursued by researchers and teachers in many places since. It seems to me that the central purpose of the Armidale conference is to review what has been achieved so far and to suggest what most needs to be done next. This paper is intended to summarize briefly my view of the present state of theory on the teaching of communication skills.

Systematic instruction in speech skills has always had some recognition in Australian education. During the first half of this century the dominant aim of speech activities in our schools was to inculcate "correct" pronunciation, intonation and grammar. The standard of correctness urged upon teachers was Southern Standard English. This aim was so obviously absurd that, although choral verse speaking, debating and direct teaching of polite speech conventions all had some vogue, the teaching of speaking and listening was generally neglected in our schools. [2]

During the late fifties the aim of correctness in speech began to be displaced by the notion of effectiveness or appropriateness. Moreover, it was recognized that ability in oral communication does not depend solely on mastery of language. As Dell Hymes said:

> (The child) acquires competence as to when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where and in what manner. In short, a child becomes able to accomplish a repertoire of speech acts, to take part in speech events and to evaluate their accomplishment by others. [3]

Speech acts and events are evaluated not according to some set of qualities or criteria of correctness but on the extent to which they achieve their purposes. Oral communication may serve an enormous variety of functions or purposes. Most of them, however, are concerned with eliciting responses and with establishing and maintaining relationships. When the response and relationships achieved through communication are satisfactory to those involved then the communication is successful for them.

Skilled communicators, then, have a high degree of success in eliciting desired responses and maintaining desired relationships. Their success rate remains high over long periods of time and over the wide variety of situations in which they may find themselves. This normally happens only when they realize that it is both unethical and unprofitable to pursue ruthlessly one's own goals at the expense of other people.

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*Much of this material has been published elsewhere. I have put it together here in the hope that it will be useful to conference participants.

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In any class a teacher will find students with varying degrees of communicative competence. The teacher's job, ideally, is to help each student develop, to the utmost of his potential, his own skills of communication.

THE BASIC METHOD

The fundamental principle in the teaching of any skill is that if the learner has lots of satisfying experience in using the skill then he gets better at it. Arthur Wise applies the principle to speech education thus:

> Every normal child that we meet in school can speak. So we are not concerned with the creation of speech, but simply with the development of what already exists. . . What we can do in school is to widen the range of situations in which the child experiences speech, and encourage the more effective use of speech in those situations. [4]

This approach to the development or oral communication skills presents the teacher as a stimulator/facilitator of learning rather than as a director/pedagogue. The teacher devises all sorts of stimulating experiences such as meeting new people, interviewing, reporting, speaking to a group, participating in group discussion, reading aloud, and role-playing. By far the most used method of providing this practice in our schools is through classroom drama. From his participation in these experiences the child learns how to use his skills of communication more effectively.

Where, then, lies the expertise which qualifies the teacher to be regarded as an expert on the teaching of oracy? Can we do more than (to use James Britton's analogy) be good gardeners who provide fertile soil in which young plants can grow to full flower?

The Basic Method Refined

A number of linguists have recently been engaged in work which can be helpful to us. They have been concerned not so much to describe language as to describe what language does. The work of Dell Hymes has already been mentioned. Others have established categories of language functions. Some of these are referred to by Wilkinson in his book Language and Education.[5] Wilkinson also suggests his own classification in that book, as follows:

Who am I?	1. Establishing and maintaining self.
	2. Language for analysing self.
	3. Language for expressing self.
Who are you?	4. Establishing and maintaining relationships.
	5. Co-operating.
	6. Empathising, understanding the other.
	7. Role playing, mimicry.
	8. Guiding, directing the other.

Who/what is he/she/it

9. Giving information.
10. Recalling past events (past).
11. Describing present events (present).
12. Predicting future events - statement of intention
    statement of hypothesis
    what might happen.
13. Analysing, classifying.
14. Exploring - asking questions, but in other way also, by sounding out people.
15. Explaining, giving reasons for.
16. Reflecting on own/others' thoughts and feelings. [6]

A classification of this kind can provide a useful checklist for an informed teacher. It will help him to plan activities which not only provide satisfying speech experiences but which will cover the whole range of types of speech experience.

The Moffett Model

The teacherswhc participated in the Secondary English Curriculum Workshop in Canberra in 1974 [7] were concerned to have some structure in their work in addition to being intuitive facilitators of good talk. They commended a model based on the work of James Moffett.[8] Their report pointed out that children have acquired a high degree of skill in the use of language by the time they start school, but in subsequent development the range widens, not so much in grammar, for most of this is already acquired, but mainly in new relationships with subject matter and with audiences. These new relationships are marked by new uses of language - greater abstraction, for instance - and a greater control over different modes and styles of use, personal and impersonal according to the social situation. [9]

This development in relationships with subject matter and audiences is illustrated by the following model.[10]

Development of Speaker's Relationship with Audience:

1. Reflection: A person thinking or talking to himself.
2. Conversation: Interpersonal communication between a few people in vocal range.
3. Correspondence: Communication between two or more with some knowledge of one another but divided by space.
4. Publications: Impersonal communication to large anonymous group somewhat remote in time and/or space.

Development of Speaker's Relationship with Subject:

A. What is happening: Drama, recording.
B. What happened: Narrative, reporting.
C. What happens: Exposition, generalising.
D. What may, will, could, ought ... happen: Logical argument, theorising.

The Curriculum Workshop Report goes on to show that:

> The two progressions - towards greater abstractions and more remote social relationships - interact. Recording, reporting, low-level generalising and high-level theorising can take place at all four levels of reflection, conversation, correspondence and publication. Thus there are really sixteen levels. 11

The teacher's job is to give the child plenty of successful experience in the levels of language use he has already achieved and to recognize when he is ready to develop his use of higher levels.

These levels are not absolute or exclusive. There is nearly always a mixture of levels in any act of communication. They do, however, provide the teacher with a guide to the sorts of skills he is helping his individual pupils to achieve. Not only do they help specify categories of skills but they suggest a sequence in which the skills are acquired.

To summarize, then: Most people agree that the basic method of developing oral communication skills is through a wide variety of satisfying experiences. Many teachers, however, are not content to regard these experiences as undifferentiated and equally appropriate. They are using various classifications of language function as a tool of diagnosis. They then try to provide experiences appropriate to the needs of their own students. They are also seeking ways of planning for sequential development of oral communication skills through progression from less difficult to more difficult experiences.

In addition to devising appropriate experiences many teachers do more. They recognize what they believe to be specific needs and seek to meet them. Three distinct, though overlapping, ways of doing this can be recognized: Teaching of Techniques, Teaching of Rhetorical Principles, and Teaching of Interaction Skills.

THREE THEORIES

Teaching of Techniques

This approach is based on the assumption that there are discrete communication skills. It sets out to teach these skills directly. (The same method is used by most teachers of swimming, skiing and golf.) Some examples of skils taught directly in this way are:

*using a telephone
*making introductions
*using acceptable pronunciations
*articulating clearly
*chairing a meeting
*making a formal speech
*listening
*summarizing a report. [12]

The usual steps in the teaching procedure are:

1. The skill or technique is explained and studied.
2. The pupils practise the skill.
3. The teacher gives constructive criticism of the preformance.

The purpose of this procedure is to make the pupil self-conscious about some skill; to give him success in using the skill; to help him to make the newly-learnt skill subconscious (or habitual).

Though such systems of instruction remain popular with sports' coaches they are out of favour with educationists. Speaking of this method, Phillips, Butt and Metzger say:

> There is little evidence that such systems of instruction have been generally effective, although it is obvious that specific individuals have benefited greatly from them. The problem is that the systems become ends in themselves. The student's success is measured against requirements for success generated by the theory of the system. [13]

Not only do such systems of instruction often teach skills of little relevance to the child's everyday needs but their effects may be of short duration. Dealing with training schemes in listening, Wilkinson, Stratta and Dudley say:

> By psyhcological processes which are now well known, they are almost bound to produce improvements. But what has not been demonstrated, and what would be very hard to demonstrate, is how permanent such gains are. There may in any case be a danger in training listening and 'listening skills' in isolation .... It seems to us that it is far better to "improve" listening in the context of interrelated improvement of oracy and literacy, and indeed of general development. [14]

Certainly the teaching of speech techniques has led to some absurd practices. Nothing could have been more sterile than the procedure, common in our primary schools until quite recently, of drilling the "correct" articulation of each individual phoneme in the language. Yet the teaching of techniques can be fruitful. Student teachers who have been trained in storytelling, businessmen who have been taught techniques of meeting control, assert that they are now more competent in situations calling for these skills.

It seems that for the teaching of techniques to be successful the student must have clear, desired goals; the training must be designed to achieve the goals while allowing for individual differences; there must be immediate application of the new skills in satisfying experiences outside the classroom. Furthermore, these procedures should be supplementary to a broad course and not allowed to develop into a normative system which becomes an end in itself.

Teaching of Rhetorical Principles

This approach is based on the assumptions that there are general principles of communication; that these are discoverable; and that, once understood, they can help individuals become more effective communicators. The prupose of this approach is to develop a deep understanding of what makes speech effective and the ability to apply that understanding to one's own behaviour.

A teacher, by virtue of his education and experience, will have discovered facts, insights, strategies and skills which he believes help him communicate more effectively. He will devise experiences which will help his pupils discover these things and verbalise them for themselves. The sort of principle should be appropriate to the child's level of maturity. Thus infants teachers start with such principles as "If everyone takes a turn, everyone gets to speak" or "Irrelevant remarks, however interesting intrinsically, do not contribute to the discussion" or "If you speak too quitely the rest of the group can't hear you." Later a child will discover that "Language is adapted to the situation and audience". In High School he may come to "Meanings are in people, not in words" or "If you wish to persuade, don't argue". In the process of investigating or experiencing various types of communication both teacher and pupils will extend their understanding and competence.

There are various systems of rhetoric which can help a teacher structure his investigations of the communication process. Classical rhetoric had five parts: Invention, Disposition, Style, Memory and Delivery. These divisions have been used by writers and teachers up to the present, except that Memory virtually disappeared after the eighteenth century.

British and Australian teachers have been inclined to think first of Delivery when considering ways of developing oral communication. A useful article by Les Cartwright exemplifies the modern version of this view.[15] Though he emphasizes the importance of encouraging students to present their own ideas, Cartwright's suggested activities are designed primarily to develop confidence, poise, clarity of diction, vocal variety and appropriate bodily activity.

In recent years British teachers have begun to give much more attention to Style in oral communication. This has been largely due to the influence of a number of distinguished linguists.[16] Andrew Wilkinson advocates making the ability to use language appropriate to the situation the first objective of speech education. He says that oracy is best promoted by arousing "an awareness of the possibilities implicit in language" so that:

1. The child is aware what language is.
2. The child is aware what language does.
3. The child is aware of the joys of language.[19]

In their work on listening Wilkinson and his colleagues emphasise the importance of analyzing language rather than teaching the listening "skills".[18]

The ancient canon of Invention was divided by Aristotle into three parts - personal proof, logical and emotional proof. Personal proof depends on the influence of the listener's perceptions of the speaker's character, sagacity and goodwill. Logical proof is concerned with the speaker's ability to recognize his own communicative purpose, to discover the main points to be stressed, and to clarify his ideas with evidence, examples, anecdotes, statistics, testimony and so on. Emotional proof is concerned with the influence of the feelings in any communication situation.

The canon of Disposition examines the influence of organization and pattern in communication. The way in which a talk, report, meeting, discussion or conversation is structured affects the nature of the communication. The ability to achieve an effective structure is a subtle skill.

It would seem that understanding what happens when people talk to one another can contribute to effectiveness in communication, provided there is a deliberate attempt to apply the principles discovered. It is important, however, that the teaching process should be through investigation - of actual events, games and simulation activities. If the teacher simply lists a set of principles, or if the principles discovered solidify into a set of rules, the process can be counter-productive.

Teaching of Interaction Skills

This approach is more concerned with the dynamics of human interaction than with the passing of messages. It sets out to teach children how to respond sensitively and empathically to others, and especially to understand and recognize the needs of others as well as one's own needs. Some examples of generalized needs which students should come to be aware of are:

*the need to reject a person's behaviour without rejecting the person.
*the need for inclusion, affection and control (i.e. influence) of all individuals in group situations.
*the need to take account of the total situation (e.g. with regard to degree of formality, time of day, simultaneous events.)
*the need to recognize role relationships (e.g. respect for status, age, position in hierarchy.)
*the need for sensitivity to nonverbal cues.

The method is to teach by example. The teacher sets out to show how he responds with openness and trust to his pupils. He tries to create in the class a spirit of acceptance and honesty in which each pupil's feeling of self-worth will be enhanced. Through discussion, simulation games and exercises the teacher seeks to foster his pupils' sensitivity to themselves, to other people and to the process of communication. The aim is to have each pupil consciously adopt an "I'm O.K., You're O.K." attitude in which he can, without rationalization, accept himself and others as worthwhile people. [19]

Phillips, Butt and Metzger suggest five basic competencies which might help to structure this approach (though they themselves adopt a basically rhetorical approach). These competencies are:

1. Role-taking ability,
2. Situational awareness,
3. Message flexibility,
4. Sensitivity to response,
5. Symbolic, conceptual and linguistic resources. [20]

They describe a person with role-taking ability as one who is "able to put himself in the position of the other person and conceptualize a communication situation with himself acting as other". It is certainly a useful skill to be able to understand how other people are likely to feel or respond and to adapt what we say accordingly.

Situational awareness helps people to adapt their communication to the particular situation. What is appropriate talk in one set of circumstances is not appropriate in another. People who are sensitive to the situation communicate more effectively.

Message flexibility enables communicators to adapt the structure of what they say according to their purpose and the response they elicit. If we are sensitive to the sort of feedback we are getting from the person we are talking to then we may be able to rephrase our message to achieve better results.

Sensitivity to response means recognising that the person we are talking to is also seeking to accomplish goals through this talk. These goals may be concerned with the ostensible purpose (for example, gaining information) or with relationship (for example, reinforcing a teacher-student hierarchical relationship) or with self-esteem (for example, giving the impression that he is not entirely ignorant of the subject).

Symbolic, conceptual and linguistic resources enable the communicator to adapt his ideas and meanings so that he is intelligible to other people and able to evoke satisfactory responses from them.

What was said above about exploring the use of language, or style, can also be useful in sensitising students to communication interactions. Students can find or invent different ways of saying the "same thing". (Give me a dollar. May I have a dollar please? How about a little loan? I'm flat broke and need a dollar. etc.). They can the suggest contexts in which each of these might be appropriate. The study of speech acts opens up all sorts of similar possibilities. [21] Consider, for example, the notions suggested by the word "gave" in:

I gave him a dollar.
I gave him a punch on the nose.
I gave him my word.
*I gave him my brother.
*I gave him the moon.

Or examine the ways words are used in such sets of sentences as:

Sally reads well but she won't act.
The play reads well but it won't act.
*The car reads well but has been acting up on me.

These linguistic insights, however, need to be related to all aspects of pragmatics. Context (including the participants) interacts with language to change meaning and hence the ways people respond to one another and to messages. [22]

Advocates of the teaching of interaction skills see this as the responsibility of all teachers. The skills are more likely to be affectively caught then cognitively taught. The approach does, however, offer some insights for the teacher who is concerned with helping his students develop their skills of oral communication.

CONCLUSION

Although children have developed a high degree of skill in oral communication before they come to school it is very important that they should be helped to develop their skill to the utmost. The fundamental way in which they will do this is through a variety of satisfying experiences of speaking and listening. The teacher's role is one of organiser or co-ordinator rather than pedagogue. He will promote and stimulate good talk. He will evaluate the talk in behavioural terms (whether it fulfils its functions) rather than in terms of its attributes (whether it has particular qualities of usage, vocabulary, etc). His own communicative behaviour may be the most important influence he has on the behaviour of his students.

Teachers, however, should be more than facilitators of good talk. They can intervene to promote learning. They should themselves have a good understanding of the process of communication so that they can be aware of the functions of their interventions. If they do have this understanding they will be able to diagnose the needs of their students and devise activities to meet those needs. They will be able to synthesise the various aspects of the programme.

Each of the three approaches described above (though they all overlap) may suggest different ways in which the teacher may intervene. All three approaches, however, can be misused. There is always the danger of becoming caught up in a method or a programme and forgetting the individual needs of the students. Nevertheless, the teacher who chooses eclectically may become more purposeful and effective in helping his students to develop their skills of oral communication.

The Armidale conference will bring together selected people from a wide vareity of backgrounds. Our first problem will be to communicate effectively among ourselves. If we can do this we will all benefit from the experience of others and talk our way into new understandings of the nature and teaching of communication skills.

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